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AUTHOR Villwock, Diane Nanette; Black, Kathryn Norcross
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ABSTRACT

It has been reported by previous research that offspring ratings of feelings of closeness to father are more negative for divorced fathers than for fathers in intact marriages. This study investigated the impact of a number of variables on college-aged offspring ratings of feelings of closeness to their fathers. Subjects included college students whose parents were divorced (N=99) and college students from intact families (N=110) who completed self-report questionnaires measuring closeness, socioeconomic status, fathers' behaviors, parenting style, and divorce experience. In agreement with previous findings, divorced fathers received lower average ratings than did married fathers. Perceiving the father as accepting and trustworthy was strongly related to feelings of closeness to him. When the effects of other variables were held constant with multiple regression, ratings of closeness to fathers were higher when fathers more frequently performed supportive behaviors for the offspring, more frequently initiated interaction with the offspring, avoided getting angry with the offspring, and avoided performing some general problem behaviors. Group differences may result from differences between the fathers on these variables or from other variables which are directly affected by divorce. (Author/ABL)

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of a number of variables on college-aged offspring ratings of feelings of closeness to their father. Ninety-nine students whose parents were divorced and 110 students from intact families completed self-report questionnaires. In agreement with previous findings, divorced fathers received lower average ratings than married fathers. Perceiving the father as accepting and trustworthy was strongly related to feelings of closeness to him. When the effects of other variables were held constant with multiple regression, ratings of closeness to fathers were higher when he more frequently performed supportive behaviors for the offspring, more frequently initiated interaction with the offspring, avoided getting angry with the offspring, and avoided performing some general problem behaviors. Group differences may result from differences between the fathers on these variables or from other variables which are directly affected by divorce.

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Closeness in Father-Offspring Relationships: Do Differences Linked to Paternal Marital Status Persist in a Multivariate Approach?

Diane Nanette Villwock and Kathryn Norcross Black
Purdue University

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Requests for reprints should be sent to:
Kathryn N. Black, Ph.D.
Department of Psychological Sciences
Purdue University
West Lafayette, Indiana 47907

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Closeness in Father-Offspring Relationships; Do Differences Linked to Paternal Marital Status Persist in a Multivariate Approach?

It has been reported by five studies using six different measures that offspring ratings of feelings of closeness to father are more negative for divorced fathers than for fathers in intact marriages (Black, 1985; Fine, Moreland & Schwebel, 1983; Parish & Kappes, 1980; Peterson & Zill, 1986; White, Bimerhoff & Booth, 1985).

A number of persons have warned against using global, distal variables, such as marital status, to define group membership (e.g.: Lamb & Bronson, 1980; Pederson, 1976). Such variables are problematical because there is likely more variance within the groups than between them, and because it is likely that more proximal variables are causative. This research considers both the effects of paternal marital status and proximal variables which are suspected to affect closeness between children and fathers.

College students were chosen as subjects since most prior research has examined parent-child relationships of college-age offspring. Further, the use of college students allowed the examination of relationships of fathers and children who live separately for reasons other than divorce.

On the basis of a general consideration of the literature on parent-child relations, we selected general categories of variables that appeared likely to impact closeness. These were: parenting style; general supportive behavior including financial support; parental problem behaviors; and perceived parental relationship.

This study used multivariate analyses to determine if father

marital status will be related to offspring reports of closeness when these more proximal variables are also considered.

Method

Subjects. Introductory psychology students from a large midwestern state university participated in this project for class credit. Fifty-nine percent of the sample were male, and their mean age was 19 years. Sixty percent were freshman, and 92% were Caucasian. Parents for the intact group had to be continuously married to each other while parents for the divorce group had to be presently divorced or separated from each other. There were 89 in the divorce group and 121 in the intact group. Within the divorce group 45 of the fathers had remarried and 44 had not.

The median income for fathers in both groups was the $40,000 - $49,999 category, and approximately fifty percent of each group held at least a bachelor's degree. Fathers did not differ on occupational prestige. The mothers in the two groups differed with respect to education, employment and income.

Procedures. Subjects were tested in groups of 50 or less and were given two questionnaires. The first questionnaire was identical for all subjects. A second questionnaire had separate forms for those with still-married or divorced/separated parents. About 60% of subjects of each group completed the questionnaires in one session while 40% required two consecutive evenings.

The questionnaires contained many measures used by previous authors. Each of these was factor analyzed and alphas for each were calculated. Some scales were altered due to the results of these analyses. Each is described below.

Measures of closeness previously used (Black, 1985; Cooper (1966); Fine, et al., 1983); Peterson & Zill, 1986; White, et al., 1985; Parish & Kappes, 1976) were administered to all subjects. The first five scales used Likert-type ratings while Parish and Kappes used a checklist of adjectives, half positive and half negative. The reliability of these measures has either been reported by others or obtained in pilot work for this study and ranges from .92 to .96. Subjects completed all of these measures for father and all measures but the Cooper for their mothers.

Dimensions of parenting style were assessed using Rowe's (1981) shortened form of Schaefer's (1965) Children's Reports of Parental Behavior Inventory. The three subscales are: psychological control versus psychological autonomy; acceptance versus rejection; and firm versus lax control. Alphas for the scales were .77, .93, and .82, respectively. Because of the factor analysis shortened versions of the firm versus lax control and control versus autonomy scales were used.

Father supportive behavior was assessed by use of the Barrera, Sandler and Ramsay Social Support Scale (1981). All items were retained with an alpha of .95.

Socioeconomic status was assessed by Siegel's Prestige Scale (Hauser & Featherman, 1977).

Items were also created for this research. Factor analyses were done and alphas were calculated for these items in order to determine that these were reliable measures. The scales will now be briefly described and the alpha noted.

Some items were devised to assess the fathers' behaviors. These included: an 11 item problem behavior scale (alpha = .65); a

4 item assessment of father trustworthiness (alpha = .84); a 4 item assessment of father's expression of anger toward the offspring (alpha = .86). A 24 item scale was devised to assess the subject's perception of the quality of the parental relationship (alpha = .95). One item assessed the amount of time offspring resided with their father during the previous year. Three items assessed the amount of parent-initiated contact. Three separate measures of financial issues were obtained. The amount of father financial support was assessed with 4 items (alpha = 0.84); father's attitudes about financial support was assessed with 2 items (r = .60). The perceived financial situation in the father's home was assessed with one item.

Finally, information was obtained concerning the divorce experience. Questions were asked about age at separation, at divorce, at father's and mother's remarriage; custody; feelings of anger at parents for divorcing; quality of parental interactions before and during the divorce; and reasons for the divorce.[1]

Results

Bivariate Analyses. The first goal of this study was to replicate earlier studies which found that reported feelings of closeness to father were less positive for divorced fathers than for still-married fathers. Mean father closeness scores were lower ($p < .001$) for the divorce group on all six measures. Using a rule-of-thumb that effect sizes greater than 0.70 are moderate and those greater than 0.90 are large, these effect sizes ranged from moderate to quite large. It is important to note that while the paternal closeness means are significantly different for married

and divorced groups, some fathers in both groups were perceived at high and low levels of closeness. The frequency distribution of scores of all subjects was divided into equal thirds, and the proportion of subjects in each third was calculated separately for the two groups. About one sixth of the subjects from intact families reported feeling distant from their father and about an equal proportion of subjects with divorced fathers report feeling very close to their father.

One way to consider why ratings differ for the two groups of fathers is to examine the means for each group on the predictor variables which will be used in the multivariate analysis.

Compared to offspring with divorced fathers, those whose fathers are still married to their mothers reported that their fathers: performed supportive behaviors more frequently; were more accepting of the offspring; initiated contact more often; were more trustworthy and dependable; performed problem behaviors less frequently; provided more financial support; were more positive about giving financial support. It is relevant here to note that the occupational prestige and income reported for the fathers did not differ for the two groups nor did the perceived differences in father's household financial situation.

Multivariate Analyses. In order to simplify the analyses of the impact of the predictors a single measure of closeness was developed. A factor analysis was done of all items from the closeness measures, except the Parish checklist. Analysis of these 57 items yielded two factors with the first factor containing 49 of the 57 items. In order to further reduce the size of the new scale only items loading above .70 were included. This resulted in a 20

item measure with an alpha coefficient of .97. The 20 items are listed in Table 1. The letter in parentheses following each item is the initial of the last name of the author of the scale from which the item was taken.

The new closeness measure for mothers was composed of 16 of 20 items used for the father scale as 4 Cooper items were not available for mothers. The alpha for this scale was .96.

Two of the predictors were extremely highly correlated with the criterion measure. The Schaefer Acceptance vs. Rejection Scale correlated at .88 and Father's Trustworthiness correlated at .77. Because of the magnitude of these correlations, these measures were omitted from the multivariate analyses.

A test for group by predictor interactions found a group by Closeness to Mother interaction. Graphing the interactions made it clear that for the intact group feelings of closeness to each parent are positively correlated, while for the divorce group there was no relationship between offspring feelings for each parent. The interaction term was not included in subsequent analyses as it accounted for a very small portion of the overall variance.

A two step multiple regression was performed in order to test for spuriousness, mediation effects and to see what predictors were significant in multivariate analysis.[2] The effect of paternal marital status would be spurious if it was not a significant predictor when other variables were also included. The effect of father marital status would be mediated when predictors known to be directly affected by divorce were added in a second step of a regression. This nullified or greatly reduced the effect of

marital status (Baron & Kenney, 1986; Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

Four of the variables were judged to be directly affected by divorce: Mother's Occupational Prestige, Time Resided with parents in the past year, Amount of Financial Support Given and Number of Miles to Ss Residence. The remaining variables were entered simultaneously in the first step. The resulting equations are summarized in Table 4. The "b's" listed are unstandardized coefficients.

In the first step of the test for mediation effects, nine of the predictors were statistically significant, with an overall r-squared of .65. High ratings of feelings of closeness to father were related to a) his performing supportive behaviors relatively frequently, b) his initiating contact with the offspring relatively frequently, c) his performing the heterogeneous problem behaviors relatively infrequently, d) relatively infrequent mother-initiated contact with the offspring, e) feeling close to one's mother, f) the father using guilt induction control techniques relatively infrequently, g) the father getting angry with the subject relatively infrequently, and h) the father still being married to the subject's mother.

In the second step the r-squared increased by .02. There were few changes in the b's and significance of the predictors except that the effect of paternal marital status was no longer significant. The b for paternal marital status in the first equation was -.357, and -.179 in the second. The first b can be interpreted as the magnitude of total effect of paternal marital status, the second as the magnitude of the direct effect. Therefore, about half of the total effect of paternal marital

status was a direct effect, and about half was indirect. This supports the idea that the effect of marital status on closeness is mediated by variables directly affected by divorce. Of four predictors added on this step, only the amount of time the subject and father resided together was significant; feeling close was related to having spent relatively more time together.

Discussion

This study replicated previous findings in that for each of the six measures of closeness, ratings were higher for offspring of still-married fathers. The size of the effect varied widely across the six measures.

Using multiple regression, a number of analyses were performed to see if the effect of paternal marital status upon feelings of closeness was spurious, or if it was mediated by other variables linked with divorce. A wide range of predictor variables was suggested by theorizing concerning parent-child relationships and by previous research. Measures of these predictors were taken from previous research when possible and new ones formulated when necessary.

In order to simplify the analyses and interpretation of the multivariate regressions, a single measure of closeness was created based upon a factor analysis of the items from five of the six closeness measures. (Parish's Check List could not be included in such a factor analysis.) Examination of the content of the 20 items suggests that the new measure defines closeness broadly to encompass not only emotional reactions to the father and offspring-father relationship but also the quality of their communication and

the extent to which the offspring identifies with and respects the father.

Using this measure we have found that paternal marital status was not a significant predictor when other variables that are fairly directly affected by divorce were included in the regression. That is, although groups of offspring from intact or divorced families will differ in the extent of their closeness to their father, this appears partially to be the result of differences between the fathers in some characteristics such as the amount of support and the initiation of contact and partially to be mediated by some variables such as the amount of time they are together and the financial support given.

One of the major implications of this study is a methodological one. Those persons investigating the effects of divorce upon behaviors in which parental mental health may be a factor should include measures that attempt to assess parental adjustment and behavior. Sorosky has reported that 65% of the reasons given for obtaining a divorce had to do with the psychological problems of a spouse. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) also concluded, on the basis not only of spouse report but also their interviews and self-report, that approximately two-thirds of the parents in their study had been moderately to severely disturbed during their marriage.

This research is in agreement with previous multi-variate investigations of variables other than closeness, e.g., Hess and Camara (1979), which found that the type of family was less important than family process variables. As did this

investigation, Hess and Camara found that the relationship between the parent and child was more influential than the interparental relationship.

One of the generalizations sometimes made in the area of divorce effects is that there are likely to be gender differences with males sometimes found to be more negatively affected than females. We did not find such differences. It seems to us most likely that whether or not such differences are found will depend upon the particular behavior considered, and so we would not want to generalize to other than feelings of closeness.

This study not only gives information about the possible effects of family status upon closeness but as importantly about the factors affecting parent-offspring closeness. Measures of the parental style dimension of acceptance and rejection were not included in the multiple regression because of high correlation with closeness. It is not clear whether this high correlation is a finding resulting from the fact that this is a major predictor of closeness or because these measures were both filtered through the offsprings' perceptions. However, there was no indication from this study that parental control was central to the prediction of closeness. Perhaps control issues are less a factor when children are living on their own. In fact, it should be noted in general that these results, as the ones done previously in this area, may be restricted not only to a population of young adults but also particularly to college students.

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Table 1

Items Used in the Closeness Scale Loadings

.80	How well do you feel you have been able to maintain a steady relationship with your father? (F)
.77	How much do you trust your father? (F)
.76	How confident are you that your father would help you when you have a problem? (F)
.70	In general, how much do you resent your father? (F)
.83	How well do you communicate with your father? (F)
.81	How well does your father understand your needs, feelings and behavior? (F)
.80	How well does your father listen to you? (F)
.73	When you are away from home, how much do you typically miss your father? (F)
.78	How much do you respect your father? (F)
.81	How much do you value your father's opinion? (F)
.79	How much do you admire your father? (F)
.79	How much would you like to be like your father? (F)
.80	I have always been able to discuss my problems with him. (C)
.81	He has made me feel that I am important to him as an individual. (C)
.78	He has always shown faith in my ability to make decisions. (C)
.74	He has always seemed to feel that being a father is satisfying and important. (C)
.89	How close do you feel toward your father? (B)
.79	How much would you like to be the kind of person your father is? (P)
.77	How well do you get along with your father? (W)
.78	How much time do you feel you spend with your father? (F)